

BEST NEWSLETTER

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BEST Line 1-800-997-2378 or 527-2378 TDD 1-800-382-0893 or 565-2276

2001 Edition, Issue 2 - August 2001

Comments From Our Division Chief

We are changing the look of our newsletter and consolidating program areas. We service all Air Force employees for health insurance, life insurance, and the Thrift Savings Plan, but not for retirement and survivorship. "Full service" employees receive retirement and survivorship servicing from the Benefits and Entitlements Service Team (BEST), while "limited service" employees receive retirement and survivorship servicing from their local Civilian Personnel Office.

More frequently you will see the terms full or limited servicing in marketing materials, newsletters, homepage and other information. By consolidating our program areas in this newsletter, we are trying to differentiate between full service and limited service articles.

Are you a full or limited service employee? On our world-wide-web, we have a listing of bases that are full service (<http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/dpc/updates/serviced.htm>) and an article called BEST Services – full vs limited services - listing those employees from limited service bases (<http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/dpc/>). The key thing to remember is if you are under limited services, you should refer all retirement and survivorship questions to your servicing Civilian Personnel Office.

We welcome your feedback on the changes to the newsletter and any suggestions you have for future articles. Suggestions can be faxed to DSN 665-2936 or mailed to the address above.

CINDY BIRGE
Chief, Special Operations Division
Directorate of Civilian Personnel

NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIBER SERVICE

The May 2001 Newsletter provided notice the BEST Newsletter Subscriber Service is active. When you use this service, it permits BEST to reduce printing and postal expenses, shorten the newsletters, distribute them quarterly, and provide more timely information. We can send important announcements, such as legislative news, systems problems or enhancements, or other valuable information via e-mail to those who subscribe. The newsletter will be sent to you as soon as it is posted. The response to our subscription service has been very good but with approximately 130,000 employees serviced by BEST, there are many who are not benefiting from this excellent source of benefits information. Subscribing is very easy!



Here is how you do it:

- Access our homepage at <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/dpc/BEST/menu.htm> and click on "Newsletter Subscription Service"
- Click on "Subscribe" for the BEST Newsletter
- Send the e-mail that pops-up; receive a confirmation notice
- If you encounter problems, click on "Help" and follow the instructions on the page.

If you do not have a computer or Internet access from home or work, you can obtain our newsletter via the Fax-back system available through the BEST telephone-automated system. You will simply call the telephone-automated system at 1-800-997-2378 or (210) 527-2378, if calling within the San Antonio area. After the identification information required at the entry menu is completed, you will reach the main menu. Press "6" for Fax-back documents, then select the menu option for the current newsletter.

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ISSUES, SYSTEMS PROBLEMS AND ENHANCEMENTS

Coming Soon (late August, early September) to a Computer Near You!!

Have Your User-Id and Password for Accessing EBIS Expired? Have You Forgotten Your AFPC Logon Password?



Good News!! You will now have another avenue for expired or forgotten passwords on the AFPC Security Logon page. The AFPC Web Security Logon program expires passwords after 90 days and deletes accounts after 120 days of nonuse. While this is very frustrating to the customers, the AFPC Security Branch advises this is a requirement we have to live with. This information is important to you because the requirement impacts the use of the BEST-automated world-wide-web Employee Benefits Information System (EBIS) application. You must have the user-id and password to access your benefits information via the EBIS application. If you haven't used the web site in a while, let's say since the November 2000 TSP Open Season, chances are good your user-id and password have been deleted and your account deactivated. A change is coming at the end of August, beginning of September. You will be able to reset or re-create your user-id and password without the help of anyone. You don't even have to call or E-mail the Technical Assistance Center (TAC). While the TAC is a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week operation, who wants to make a call when they can handle it themselves?

Do I have to use this re-creation process? No, you don't have to use this process. To help alleviate the workload of the TAC's helpdesk, this process has been built to assist users with resetting their own accounts. How will I do this myself? The following is a brief explanation of how it will work.

- As a new user, after you have entered your verification information and selected a userid and password, you will be given the option to enter four questions and answers of unique personal information, as well as the personal information required to identify yourself in our database. Contained on the same page is a button that will allow you to review and choose from a listing of common questions that might be easily remembered. Once you have created the questions and answers, it will not matter if your password has expired and your account has been deleted, you will be able to click on the button identified as "Password Re-creation Process" and reset yourself in a matter of minutes.
- Established users who want to take advantage of this new process can as well. If you already have an account set up, but want to create your questions, log on to the web site by inputting your user-id and password and pressing submit. When you arrive at the site available for access, including EBIS, scroll down to the bottom of the page. You want to click on the button identified as 'Create/Edit Questions'. On the next screen you will begin entering your four questions and answers. An item of interest to note - there is a button identified as FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions). The information contained in the FAQ will also tell you how to make these kinds of changes, as well as other information.
- Established users who don't remember their passwords and haven't created their questions will need to contact the TAC at the number located on the web site or send an e-mail. Once your account has been reset, you can access the site and create your questions in the event you forget your password again.
- Established users whose account has been deleted (120 days since you've used it) - you will need to re-create your account by pressing the 'Civilian' button at the bottom of the screen and following the instructions provided. Then you will be able to create your four personal questions in case you forget your password. If you have already created your four personal questions, just click on the 'Civilian' button and follow the instructions provided. The four questions and answers will remain in the system even though your account had been deleted. You may change or edit them as you wish.



Issues, Systems Problems, and Enhancements (Continued)



Secure Systems for Your Protection

The Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) increased its web security measures late last year. Prior to this point, you could access the BEST web-automated system and the AFPC secure web sites if your computer browser had secure socket layers (point to point) and 40-bit encryption. Encryption means your password and all information relating to you and your account are scrambled and locked with a mathematical key during the electronic transfer. In point to point, the information is scrambled on both ends. NOW, access to our system requires secure socket layers and 128-bit encryption. If your system does not permit 128-bit encryption, you may download it from your Microsoft or Netscape browser. The web applications work best using Microsoft Internet Explorer. You may download it free at Microsoft's web page located at <http://www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/default.htm>.

Of course, we still have other security measures such as the User-Id and password authentication to enter the BEST web-automated system, and the social security number and personal identification number authentication to access your personal records, but we can never be too safe since security is a high priority.



ATTENTION!! ATTENTION!!

When calling the BEST automated phone system, you will be prompted to enter your 10-digit commercial phone number, beginning with the area code (not including the "1"). This number is required to progress to the main menu where you select the benefits area you want. Please do **not** enter your home phone number as this is the number a counselor will use to contact you, if needed, during duty hours.

Many of you have wondered why the commercial phone number is used instead of the DSN number. When reviewing phone systems for use in automating personnel services for Air Force civilians, we found the one best suited to our needs was designed to operate on commercial phone numbers. It would cost more to convert the existing system for DSN use, than to continue using it as designed. Additionally, the commercial system permitted the capacity to grow on-demand as we progressed through the transition of bases without imposing a traffic overload on the Randolph AFB telephone switch.

TELL ME AGAIN -

How Do I Access the BEST Web Automated System??



You can access the web system at http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/dpc/BEST_GRB/EBIS.htm. You will need to click on "EBIS Security Logon," where you will either input your User-Id and password, or establish them by clicking on the "Civilian" button located at the bottom of the screen. Once you input your User-Id and password, click on submit and you will be transferred to a page with several buttons - one labeled "EBIS." Click and you get the EBIS main menu for benefits.

What About the BEST Telephone Automated System??



You can access the telephone-automated system by dialing our toll-free BEST Employee Line at 1-800-997-2378 or commercial number (210) 527-2378, if calling within the San Antonio area. You will press "2" to access the Benefits and Entitlements Services System, then press "1" if you are a current Air Force serviced employee. The access menu then asks you to press "1" to input your Social Security Number and PIN, or press "2" if you have forgotten your PIN. After that, you will be asked to input, or verify, your ten-digit commercial duty phone number (don't include the "1"). After you have entered this verifying information, **you will then reach the main menu where you are prompted to select the benefits area of choice.**

How to Reach a Counselor??

Should you have any questions or problems, you may reach a benefits counselor through the telephone-automated system. Once you input your identifying information and reach the main menu, you are prompted to select a benefits area. Once within the benefits program area of your choice, you can press "0" to talk with a Benefits Counselor. Benefits counselors are available Monday - Friday, from 7 a.m. - 7 p.m. Central Standard Time (CST).

Are There More Detailed Instructions Available??



You can access the BEST Homepage at <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/dpc/BEST/menu.htm> to find the document, "How to Access the BEST Automated Systems and Reach a Counselor."

HEALTH INSURANCE, LIFE INSURANCE AND THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN

Upcoming Events!

UPDATE ON THE STATUS OF LONG TERM CARE INSURANCE



In our November 2000 BEST Newsletter we provided information on the Long Term Care Insurance Program signed into law on 29 September 2000 (P.L. 106-265) for federal employees, retirees, and others. The Long-Term Care Insurance Program is scheduled to be available in October 2002. We promised to provide new information as it is received.

So what is new? Well, on 20 June 2001, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) posted the Request for Proposals (RFP) to the insurance industry. Amendments 1 and 2 to the RFP were issued on 3 July 2001, and Amendment 3 on 20 July 2001. OPM expects to receive bids from interested insurance companies by late August 2001, and to award a contract by October 2001. An Open Season for enrollment is tentatively scheduled for the summer or fall of 2002.

Long-term care is not just for senior citizens. Over 40 percent of people who are receiving long-term care are under age 65. They may need continuing care due to a serious accident, a stroke, a brain tumor, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, etc. You **can't** always prevent your need for long-term care, but you **can** protect your assets, preserve your choice of care, and reduce the burden on your family by buying long term care insurance. While the government will not be contributing toward the cost of long term care insurance, OPM expects the cost to be 15 to 20 percent less than long term care insurance available through the private sector.

We are excited about long term care insurance because it will significantly benefit many federal employees. We invite you to visit OPM's web site at <http://www.opm.gov/insure/ltc/index.htm> on a regular basis. There, you may review the Request for Proposals, the Proposed Product Design, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), and other articles.

THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN (TSP) OPEN SEASON (15 Nov 01 - 31 Jan 02)



During the last Thrift Savings Plan Open Season, many employees took advantage of increasing their TSP contributions due to legislative changes. The law permits a six percent increase of TSP contributions over a 5-year period beginning with the 15 May 2001 open season. Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) employees were allowed to contribute up to six percent of their base pay and Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) employees were allowed to contribute up to 11 percent. The changes don't stop there; during the upcoming TSP open season, beginning 15 November 2001 and running through 31 January 2002, employees will once again be able to increase their TSP contributions another percent. CSRS employees will be able to increase to seven percent and FERS employees will be able to increase to 12 percent. The next allowable increase after this open season will be during the 15 November 2002 through 31 January 2003 open season, and annually thereafter until November 2006. BEST automated telephone and web systems have been updated and are ready to take on the increases!

During the 15 November 2001 through 31 January 2002 Open Season, you can enroll or change your contribution amount by completing your election in the BEST-automated systems. You can access the phone system by calling 1-800-997-2378 or 210-527-2378, if calling within the San Antonio area. You can access the web system at http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/dpc/BEST_GRB/EBIS.htm. If you need assistance, you can reach a counselor through the telephone automated system.

To obtain TSP fact sheets, booklets, and other TSP information, such as account balance, loan, interfund transfer or withdrawal, you can access the TSP web site at <http://www.tsp.gov>.



HEALTH INSURANCE, LIFE INSURANCE AND THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN

BENEFIT NEWS!

FEHB PREMIUM CONVERSION



Can I change my health insurance coverage from Self and Family to Self Only or cancel coverage entirely at any time?

No, not if you participate in Premium Conversion. In October 2000 the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) put in place a new program called Premium Conversion. Participation is automatic unless you opt-out or waive participation. When you participate in Premium Conversion you pay your health insurance premiums with pre-tax dollars. Your Leave and Earnings Statement (LES) includes the remark "PRETAX FEHB EXCLUSION \$" and the amount of your health insurance premium. Premium Conversion allows you to reduce the amount you pay in Federal, Social Security, and most state and local taxes. It also **limits** your opportunity to change your health coverage from Self and Family to Self Only and to cancel coverage entirely. If you are participating in Premium Conversion, you may make these changes only during health benefits open season (mid-November through mid-December each year) or within 60 days after you have a qualifying life event. Your change in enrollment must be consistent with and correspond to your qualifying life event. Let's say you have family coverage for yourself and your child and your child turns 22 and is no longer eligible to be covered under your health insurance. Since you no longer have any eligible family members, this is considered a qualifying life event allowing you to change to Self Only coverage within 60 days after your child's 22nd birthday. You would not be allowed to cancel your health insurance since you are still eligible for coverage. Another example – you or your spouse are retired military and either or both of you enroll in Tricare. If you are participating in Premium Conversion, this is **NOT** a qualifying life event that would allow you to cancel your health insurance or change from Self and Family to Self Only coverage.

You can also change your participation in Premium Conversion during the annual health insurance open season or within 60 days after certain qualifying life events. You can find these events on the OPM web site for Premium Conversion at www.opm.gov/insure/health/pretaxfehb under Frequently Asked Questions. If you think you may want to cancel your health insurance coverage or change from Self and Family to Self Only coverage in 2002 and don't expect to have a qualifying life event, you may want to waive participation in Premium Conversion during health insurance open season. Your waiver will be effective the

TEMPORARY CONTINUATION OF COVERAGE (TCC)

TCC is a feature of the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) program that allows certain coverage after regular health benefits coverage ends. It is available to: (1) employees who lose their Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program coverage because they leave their federal jobs (unless separation is involuntary due to gross misconduct); (2) children who lose their FEHB family member status because they reach age 22 or marry; and (3) former spouses who lose their FEHB family member status because of divorce or annulment.

TCC allows former employees to continue their FEHB coverage for up to 18 months, and former family members (children and former spouses) to continue FEHB coverage for up to 36 months.

You must apply for TCC within 60 days from the date of the qualifying event. After the 31-day no-cost extension of group coverage ends, you pay the full premium (the enrollee and Government shares) plus a two percent administrative fee. However, if separated by reduction-in-force (RIF), you will only pay the employee portion of the premium. The government will continue to pay its share and the two percent administrative fee.

You are not limited to the plan in which you were covered prior to coverage ending but may enroll in any of the FEHB national plans or Health Maintenance Organizations in the servicing area. You must submit your request for TCC to HQ AFPC/DPCMB, 550 C Street West, Suite 57, Randolph AFB TX 78150-4759. You may also fax the request to 210-565-2936 or DSN 665-2936.

You can access the TCC Fact Sheet/Request for Coverage at www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/dpc/BEST/fehb.htm. If you are currently serviced by BEST, you can also obtain this information using the BEST-automated phone system, press "6" for Fax-back documents, then select document #1002. Once we receive the request, we will review it to ensure it contains all the information necessary to determine eligibility and forward it to the National Finance Center (NFC), P.O. Box 61760, New Orleans LA 70161-1760, for processing. The NFC will, in-turn, mail the enrollee a package outlining the procedures for collecting the premiums for the FEHB plan chosen.



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HEALTH INSURANCE, LIFE INSURANCE AND THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN

THE THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN (TSP) - WHAT'S NEW IN 2001

Employees first hired or rehired in positions where they have retirement coverage no longer have to wait to contribute to TSP. If you are first hired or rehired on or after 1 July 2001 and you have retirement coverage under the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) or Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), you are immediately eligible to enroll in TSP during an initial 60-day sign-up period. If you are a FERS employee and have never been eligible for TSP, you must still wait to receive agency contributions. If you are a rehired FERS employee and you were previously eligible to participate in the TSP, you are immediately eligible to receive agency contributions. Please review the Summary of the Thrift Savings Plan for Federal Employees available at <http://www.tsp.gov/forms/index-booklets.html> for more detailed information.

The TSP now has **five investment funds**. In addition to the G, F, and C Funds, there are the **Small Capitalization Stock Index Investment (S) Fund** and the **International Stock Index Investment (I) Fund**. You may allocate your contributions among the TSP funds at any time by using the **TSP Web site** at www.tsp.gov, the **ThriftLine**, 504-255-8777, or by mailing Form TSP-50 to the TSP record keeper at the address on the form.

Until you make a contribution allocation with the TSP, your funds will continue to be invested in the same funds on file in your TSP account. If this is your first time to contribute, or receive the Agency Automatic one percent, your money will be invested in the G Fund until you make a contribution allocation.

To use the TSP web site or ThriftLine, you will need a TSP personal identification number (PIN) (this is not the same as your BEST PIN). Your TSP PIN was mailed to you when your TSP account was opened. If you have forgotten your PIN, you can request a new one through the TSP web site or ThriftLine. You should receive your new PIN through the mail in about 10 days. If you have never been eligible for TSP (never contributed or received the Agency Automatic one percent) you will receive your TSP PIN in the mail from the TSP record keeper approximately 4 to 5 weeks after your contribution election is effective or you begin receiving the Agency Automatic one percent. Why does it take so long to receive your TSP PIN? You receive your PIN within 10 days after your account is opened. Your account isn't opened until TSP receives your account contributions from payroll, 3 weeks after the effective date - on the pay date for that pay period.

Effective July 2001, FERS employees may contribute up to 11 percent of their salaries and CSRS employees up to six percent of their salaries. The contribution limit will increase one percent each year through 2005. In 2006 the limits will be lifted entirely. Your contributions will continue to be capped by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) elective deferral limit, which is \$10,500 for 2001.

Beginning in July 2001, you may transfer funds into your TSP account from 401(k) plans and other qualified retirement plans established by your previous employer(s) or from conduit Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs). You will use the Form TSP 60, available on the TSP web site.



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FEHB PREMIUM CONVERSION

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1st pay period in January 2002. You will not receive the tax advantage Premium Conversion provides but you will be able to cancel your health insurance coverage or change from Self and Family to Self Only coverage at any time. You may obtain the waiver form from our web site at <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/dpc/BEST/fehb.htm> or by calling the BEST telephone automated system. Once you access the system, press "6" for Fax-back documents, then select document #1005.

Please visit the OPM web site at <http://www.opm.gov/insure/health/pretaxfehb> for more detailed information on Premium Conversion. The information on changing your health coverage from Self and Family to Self Only or canceling coverage entirely provided at the top of the Table of Permissible Events in the health insurance handbook and in the health insurance enrollment form (SF 2809) has not been updated and does not apply if you participate in Premium Conversion.

HEALTH INSURANCE, LIFE INSURANCE AND THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN

BENEFIT NEWS CONTINUED



FOSTER CHILDREN AND FEHB



Can I cover my grandchild under my Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB)?

Yes, if he/she meets the requirements under “**Foster Children**”. Grandchildren are not the only children that may be eligible, as long as the following requirements are met: the child must be unmarried and under age 22 (if the child is over age 22, he/she must be incapable of self-support); the child must live with you; the parent-child relationship must be with you, not the child's biological parent; you must be the primary source of financial support for the child; and you must expect to raise the child to adulthood. You don't need to be related to the child nor do you need to legally adopt him/her as long as the above requirements are met. You may have a foster parent-child relationship even when: the child's natural parents are alive; the child's natural parent lives with you; or the child receives some support from sources other than you (for example, social security payments or support payments from a parent).

Common examples of a foster parent-child relationship are: (1) a child whose parents have died and is living with, and being supported by, a close relative who is an enrollee; (2) a child who is living with and who is financially dependent on a grandparent who is an enrollee (the natural parent of the child may also be a dependent); (3) a child who is living with an enrollee under a preadoption agreement or (4) a child who is in the legal custody of an enrollee.

For your foster child to be covered under your FEHB enrollment, **you must sign a certification statement** stating your foster child meets all the requirements and you will notify your employing office if the child marries, moves out of the home, or stops being financially dependent on you. To obtain a copy of the certification statement, you may access the BEST web at <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/dpc/BEST/fehb.htm> or access the telephone system by calling 1-800-997-2378 or 210-527-2378, if calling within the San Antonio area. The **effective date** of your foster child's coverage as a family member is the first day of the pay period in which you sign the certification statement. When the foster child's mother is an eligible family member under your enrollment, you may request the effective date be the first day of the pay period in which the child is born.



FEHB AND DISABLED CHILDREN INCAPABLE OF SELF SUPPORT



I have a disabled child who just turned 22 -- can I continue FEHB coverage on this child? If yes, what is required?

YES, if your child is incapable of self-support. Your child may be covered if the disability existed before he/she became 22 and if the disability is expected to continue for more than one year. Depending on your child's medical documentation, BEST may approve coverage for a limited period of time (1 year, for example), or without time limitation (permanent). You must obtain a medical certificate from your child's physician and provide it to BEST for use in determining whether the child is incapable of self-support due to a physical or mental disability. Additional information may be found in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Handbook, which may be accessed on our homepage at <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/dpc/BEST/menu.htm>. When you reach our homepage, click on "Health Insurance," then on "FEHB Program Handbook for Enrollees and Employing Offices." When the handbook opens, click on "Family Members," then on "Child Incapable of Self-Support."

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

FEHB OPEN SEASON

12 Nov 01 - 10 Dec 01

During open season you can:

Enroll in health insurance; change your plan or option,
Change from Self and Family to Self Only,
Cancel health coverage entirely, and
Change your participation in Premium Conversion.

TSP OPEN SEASON

15 Nov 01 - 31 Jan 02

During open season you receive:

An opportunity to start making contributions,
An opportunity to change your contribution amount,
- FERS members can contribute up to 12 percent
- CSRS members can contribute up to 7 percent
Updated information at: <http://www.tsp.gov>.

ALWAYS REVIEW YOUR LEAVE AND EARNINGS STATEMENT (LES) TO ENSURE YOUR ELECTIONS ARE ACCURATELY REFLECTED



HEALTH INSURANCE, LIFE INSURANCE AND THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN

BENEFIT NEWS CONTINUED



FEGLI OPEN SEASON??

When is the next Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) Open Season?



Life insurance open seasons are held quite infrequently, and you should not count on one occurring any time soon. You will receive plenty of notice if and when there is another open season.

There are two other opportunities to make changes: life event and physical exam. A life event can be: marriage, divorce, death of a spouse, or acquisition of a child. With a life event, you have 60 days from the date of the event to elect Option B and/or C, or increase your multiples. You must already be enrolled in Basic coverage. BEST conducts a 100 percent review of all life insurance election increases. When you are audited, if you fail to submit the proper documentation, or the documentation does not support the type of action or the timeliness of the election, your election will be voided, the coverage terminated, and you may be subject to disciplinary or other types of action, as deemed appropriate. Employees who knowingly falsify information in the system to complete the election may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including removal. So, be safe and not sorry later. For more information regarding non-open season elections and permissible life events, please see the Federal Employee Life Insurance Handbook, and the table of Permissible Events located on our homepage at <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/dpc/BEST/menu.htm> under life insurance.

If at least one year has passed since your last waiver, you may become insured if you provide satisfactory medical evidence of insurability. To initiate this process, call the BEST telephone-automated system, enter the life insurance module, and transfer to a benefits counselor to request Standard Form 2822 (Request for Insurance). The counselor will complete the agency portion of the SF 2822 and mail it to you. You must sign the employee portion and have your personal doctor complete the medical certificate. You are responsible for any fee charged for medical examination and certification. Your doctor must forward the completed SF 2822 directly to the Office of Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance (OFEGLI), where it must be received within 60 days of the date of medical exam.

OFEGLI will notify BEST you have been approved to become insured or to obtain additional life insurance. A BEST Counselor will contact you to discuss your election options and cost of premiums. You have 31 days to elect Option A – Standard and/or Option B – Additional, up to five times your pay. Please note, you cannot elect Option C – Family option or increase your multiples of Option C coverage by getting a physical exam. You can obtain Option C – Family coverage only based on a life event. If life insurance coverage is disapproved by OFEGLI a BEST Counselor will provide you a phone number and address to contact OFEGLI for an explanation of the reasons your request for insurance was disapproved.



TEMPORARY CONTINUATION OF COVERAGE (TCC)

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A former spouse of a federal employee or annuitant may also qualify under the Spouse Equity Provision if she or he: (1) was covered under FEHB as a family member at some time during the 18 months before the marriage ended, (2) has not remarried before reaching age 55, and (3) has a qualifying court order (that is, a court order that awards the former spouse a portion of the employee's or retiree's annuity or a survivor benefit based on the employee's or retiree's federal civilian service). If you qualify under the spouse equity provisions you will pay the full premium, both the employee and government shares, but will not have to pay the two percent administrative fee.

Coverage under a spouse equity enrollment does not begin until the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) reviews the court order to determine if it is "qualifying". If you feel you meet the above qualifying criteria, send your request for determination to the Office of Personnel Management, Retirement and Insurance Group, Office of Retirement Programs, P.O. Box 17, Washington DC 20044. This request must include the following information: (1) a certified copy (not a photocopy of a certified copy) of the divorce decree, property settlement, and/or court order and (2) the employee's name, date of birth, social security number, and last employing agency (if applicable). Once OPM has reviewed all the information you have provided, they will send you a written decision. If you are eligible, you will then submit OPM's determination, the request for coverage with the court order attached by mail to HQ AFPC/DPCMB, 550 C Street West Suite 57, Randolph AFB TX 78150-4759 for processing.

RETIREMENT

FOR FULL SERVICED EMPLOYEES

FERCCA UPDATE

In January 2001, BEST was tasked by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to identify all employees who believe they qualify for relief under the Federal Erroneous Retirement Coverage Corrections Act (FERCCA) and enter those individuals in OPM's FERCCA Database. Letters were mailed to all full-service employees in February 2001 explaining FERCCA and asking employees to notify BEST if they believe they are or have been in the wrong retirement coverage. To date, BEST has received requests from 2,225 employees to review their official personnel records. BEST is happy to report we have completed the review of 99 percent of those requests. Of the 2,225 requests for review, only five percent were found to have FERCCA related errors and nine percent were found to have retirement coverage errors that were not covered under FERCCA. BEST notified each employee by letter of the determination that was made. Those individuals with FERCCA errors were registered in the OPM FERCCA Database and advised to monitor OPM's progress in implementing FERCCA at OPM's FERCCA website located at <http://www.opm.gov/benefits/correction>. BEST continues to receive an average of 10-15 requests weekly to review records from employees who believe they may have retirement coverage errors covered under FERCCA.

The FERCCA Database will remain open for registration until at least October 2002. If you believe you may have a retirement coverage error and have not already notified BEST, please identify yourself by completing and faxing to BEST at DSN 665-2936, the "Request for Review of Official Personnel Records". This document can be found on our web page at <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/dpc/BEST/FERCCA.htm>, click on "Employee Letter for Full-Service Employees, or by Fax-back document, Document #2016, via the BEST-automated phone system at 1-800-997-2378 or 210-527-2378, if calling within the San Antonio area.

If you receive notification you qualify for relief under FERCCA, be sure to keep the information in the FERCCA Database current by notifying OPM of any changes in your mailing address, home and work telephone numbers and e-mail address. You can contact OPM with updated information via the FERCCA Hotline, 1-888-689-3233, by e-mail, FERCCA@OPM.gov, or by FAX, 202-606-1108 - Attention: FERCCA Implementation. We are aware those of you with FERCCA errors are anxiously waiting to hear from OPM regarding your retirement coverage error. OPM is projecting they will begin reviewing active employee cases in September 2001 and begin sending decision information out in October 2001.

FERS RETIREMENT OPTION: MRA+10 AND MRA+10 POSTPONED

Employees covered by the Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS) have a retirement choice not available to Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) employees. FERS employees may retire on an immediate annuity with 10 years of creditable service (five of those years must be civilian service) at their minimum retirement age (MRA), which is between age 55 and 57, depending on your year of birth. This type of voluntary retirement, however, does impose a reduction in your annuity of five percent for every year you are under the age of 62 (5/12 percent per month). The reduction is permanent and does not stop when you reach age 62.

FERS employees who meet the eligibility requirements for the MRA+10 retirement may choose to postpone receipt of their annuity to lessen or avoid the reduction. This is called a postponed MRA+10 retirement.

A postponed annuity may not appear to be an attractive alternative; however, it does offer significant benefits for those leaving federal service for reasons such as caring for a family member or taking advantage of private sector employment. After separation and while the annuity is postponed, health and life insurance benefits are suspended. This works well if you have insurance coverage available through another employer or your spouse. If, at separation, the 5-year requirement for continuing health and life insurance benefits are met, your benefits will be reinstated when your annuity payments begin. In the event you die before a postponed annuity commences, your survivors are entitled to survivor benefits just as if the annuity had already begun. Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) is not payable prior to the date the annuity commences.

While a postponed MRA+10 retirement may not satisfy all of your retirement goals, it could provide you with just the flexibility you need to explore other opportunities or meet personal goals without giving up the security of lifelong benefits.



RETIREMENT CONTINUED



“DID YOU KNOW?????”

Retirement Annuity Start Date

Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS): if you retire voluntarily under the CSRS, you can set your retirement date for the first, second, or third day of the month, and your annuity begins the following day. For example, assuming your retirement effective date is April 3rd, your annuity begins to accrue April 4th. If you retire voluntarily on the fourth day or after, you will not begin to accrue an annuity until the first day of the following month.

Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS): if you voluntarily retire under the FERS, whatever day you select as a retirement date, your annuity will begin to accrue the first day of the following month. For example, if you select March 31 as the effective date of your retirement, your annuity will commence on 1 April. However, if you opt to retire 3 April, your annuity will not commence until 1 May. Unlike CSRS, there is no provision for employees who serve three days or less in the month of retirement or any provision allowing a voluntary retirement annuity to begin on the day after the last day of pay.

Lump Sum Annual Leave Payment

If you retire before the end of the leave year, you will receive a lump sum payment for all of your accrued leave. However, if you retire after the end of the leave year, your lump sum leave payment will be limited to that maximum amount of leave allowable, which for most employees is 240 hours. For example, if you retire on 3 January and the leave year does not end until 5 January, you will be paid for your entire balance of annual leave and it will not be limited to your maximum carry over (typically 240 hours). However, if you retire on 7 January and the leave year ends on 5 January, you will be paid a lump-sum annual leave payment for your accrued annual leave limited to the maximum carry over (typically 240 hours).

Where You Can Find Answers to Your Questions

Helpful information in answering your benefits and entitlements questions can be found on the BEST Homepage located at <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/dpc/BEST/menu.htm>. Just click on the subject of interest and browse around. Congratulations! You are on your way to being a well and accurately informed employee!!



DO YOU HAVE HONORABLE ACTIVE DUTY MILITARY SERVICE?

Did you know all honorable active duty military service is potentially creditable toward your retirement?

If you are just beginning your civilian career – don't put this off thinking you have a long way to go to retirement. Depending on when you make your military deposit – you can save yourself future yearly interest costs.

For full service employees, if you were in the military and are now in a retirement covered civilian position – there are advantages to getting credit for your military service. Is it right for you? Here are a few of the questions that need to be answered to help you make your decision.... are you covered under Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) or the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS)? Will you be eligible for Social Security at age 62? Are you retired military? What date did you begin your civilian career? What will it cost?

If you want to know more about getting credit for your military service, go to our web site at <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/dpc/BEST/retirements-csrs.htm> for CSRS employees or <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/dpc/BEST/retirements-fers.htm> for FERS employees or call the BEST Employee Line at 1-800-997-2378 or commercial 527-2378, if calling within the San Antonio area. Once in the BEST automated phone system, press “2” for Retirement at the main menu, then “0” to transfer to a counselor. A benefits counselor can look at your record and provide information to help you make an informed decision. If you are a limited serviced employee, you will need to contact your servicing Civilian Personnel Office.



NEARLY 65?



AN IMPORTANT REMINDER regarding Medicare. Whether you are a current employee or in the process of retirement, if you are not already receiving Social Security benefits you must begin the process of signing up for Medicare Part A three months before your 65th birthday (you may delay the start of Part B). For additional information regarding Medicare coverage go to www.medicare.gov.